

Analytical Study of the Functioning, Implementation, and Challenges of Village Child Protection Committees under Mission Vatsalya in Raipur District, Chhattisgarh

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Abstract: *Background:* Mission Vatsalya is a flagship child protection program of the Government of India that aims to strengthen community-based child protection through Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs). The present study examined the functioning, implementation, and challenges of VCPCs under Mission Vatsalya in Raipur district, Chhattisgarh.

Methods: A mixed-method analytical research design was adopted. The study was conducted in 30 purposively selected Gram Panchayats of Raipur district, involving 240 respondents selected through purposive sampling. Primary data were collected using a structured interview schedule, while Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted to obtain qualitative insights.

Results: The findings showed that 52.91% of respondents agreed that VCPCs had been properly constituted, 66.66% reported adequate stakeholder representation, and 49.58% perceived that the committees actively addressed child protection issues. Awareness of Mission Vatsalya was reported by 45.42% of respondents. Inadequate financial resources (59.58%), social barriers (42.92%), and limited community participation (44.16%) emerged as major challenges. Qualitative findings further revealed irregular committee meetings, inadequate training, weak interdepartmental coordination, and limited financial support as barriers affecting the effective functioning of VCPCs. *Conclusion:* VCPCs have strengthened community-based child protection under Mission Vatsalya; however, their effectiveness remains constrained by financial, administrative, and social challenges. Strengthening capacity building, resource allocation, interdepartmental convergence, community awareness, and monitoring mechanisms is essential to improve child protection at the grassroots level

Keywords: Mission Vatsalya, Village Child Protection Committee (VCPC), Child Rights, Child Protection, Implementation Challenges.

Introduction

Children are the foundation of every nation's future, and their survival, protection, development, and participation are essential for sustainable social and economic development. A safe and supportive environment promotes children's physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth, whereas exposure to violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, child labour, child marriage, trafficking, and social exclusion adversely affects their well-being and future opportunities (UNICEF, 2026; World Health Organization, 2020). Guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the principle of "Leave No Child Behind," child protection has become a global priority, with Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms (CBCPMs) recognized as effective approaches for identifying vulnerable children and ensuring timely community-based interventions (United Nations, 2015; Wessells, 2015; World Bank, 2020). India has one of the largest child populations in the world, making child protection a national priority. Despite constitutional and legal safeguards, challenges such as child labour, child marriage, school dropout, trafficking, abuse, and neglect persist (India & Indicators, 2011; National Crime Records Bureau, 2024). To address these issues, the Government of India launched Mission Vatsalya, implemented through Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs), which promote community-based child protection, awareness, service convergence, and timely support for vulnerable children under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 and the POCSO Act, 2012 (Menon, 2024; Nandan, 2022).

Previous studies have highlighted both the strengths and challenges of community-based child protection systems. UNICEF (2021) identified poverty, social inequality, and weak institutional capacity as major barriers to effective child protection, while Save the Children (2009) reported that community-based child protection committees are effective in identifying vulnerable children and facilitating timely interventions when supported by adequate training and community participation. Studies in India have similarly identified inadequate financial resources, weak interdepartmental coordination, limited legal awareness, and insufficient monitoring as major constraints affecting programme implementation (Chattoraj, 2025; Patel, 2020; Pandey et al., 2021).

Although Mission Vatsalya has strengthened India's child protection framework, empirical evidence on the functioning of Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs), particularly at the grassroots level, remains limited. Chhattisgarh, especially Raipur district, continues to face child protection concerns such as child marriage, child labour, school dropout, and child neglect, making it an important setting for evaluating Mission Vatsalya.

Therefore, the present study was undertaken to examine the functioning, implementation, and challenges of Village Child Protection Committees under Mission Vatsalya in Raipur district, Chhattisgarh. Specifically, the study aimed to assess the structure and functioning of Village Child Protection Committees, examine community awareness and participation, identify operational challenges affecting programme implementation, and generate evidence-based recommendations for strengthening grassroots child protection systems. The findings are expected to contribute to improving the effectiveness of Mission Vatsalya and support policy

initiatives aimed at promoting child protection through community-based institutional mechanisms.

Methods

Study Design and Setting

The present study employed a mixed method research design with an analytical approach to examine the functioning, implementation status, and challenges of Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs) under Mission Vatsalya in Raipur district, Chhattisgarh, India. The study was conducted in 30 purposively selected Gram Panchayats, in which 240 respondents selected through the purposive sampling technique. The study adopted a multi-stakeholder approach, including Village Child Protection Committee members, Anganwadi workers, Panchayat representatives, parents, and children. On average, eight respondents were selected from each Gram Panchayat to facilitate a detailed assessment of the functioning of Village Child Protection Committees. Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the concerned administrative authorities and Gram Panchayats. The objectives and purpose of the study were explained to all participants before obtaining their informed consent. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were strictly maintained, and the information collected was used exclusively for research purposes.

Primary data was collected through structured and semi-structured interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and direct observation of Village Child Protection Committee meetings, activities, and records. To enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, the interview schedule was pre-tested before the final survey, and data collected from multiple sources were triangulated.

Measures

Socio-demographic Information Schedule: A semi-structured socio-demographic schedule was developed for the present study to collect background information about the respondents. The schedule included variables such as age, gender, educational status, occupation, stakeholder category, village, and other socio-economic characteristics relevant to the study.

Structured Interview Schedule: - A structured and semi-structured interview schedule was developed to assess the functioning of Village Child Protection Committees under Mission Vatsalya. The interview collected information regarding committee composition, membership, frequency of meetings, record maintenance, decision-making processes, implementation of child protection activities, interdepartmental coordination, resource availability, and operational challenges.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide: A Focus Group Discussion guide was used to collect qualitative information from parents and community members regarding their awareness of

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child protection issues, perceptions of Mission Vatsalya, community participation, local challenges, and suggestions for strengthening Village Child Protection Committees.

Observation Checklist: A structured observation checklist was used to directly observe Village Child Protection Committee meetings, committee activities, documentation practices, community participation, and the overall functioning of the committees. The observation method enabled the researcher to validate information obtained through interviews and discussions.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using **descriptive statistical techniques**, including frequencies and percentages, to summarize respondents' responses regarding the functioning and implementation of Village Child Protection Committees. Qualitative data obtained through interviews, Focus Group Discussions, and observations were analyzed using **thematic analysis** to identify recurring themes, implementation gaps, and operational challenges. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provided a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of Mission Vatsalya and the functioning of Village Child Protection Committees at the grassroots level.

Results

Structure and Functioning of Village Child Protection Committees

Table 1 reveals that among the 240 respondents' perceptions regarding the structural and functional aspects of Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs). More than half of the respondents (52.91%) agreed that VCPCs had been properly constituted, indicating satisfactory implementation of committee formation at the village level. A larger proportion (66.66%) reported that the committees comprised representatives from relevant stakeholder groups, suggesting that the prescribed membership structure had largely been achieved. However, only 49.58% agreed that the committees actively addressed child protection issues, whereas 30.84% expressed disagreement. 18.75% disagreed about the inclusiveness of committee membership, and 30.84% perceived that committee activities were inadequate. These findings indicate that although the institutional framework of VCPCs is generally well established, their operational performance varies across Gram Panchayats.

Table 1. Structure and Functioning of Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs) (n = 240)

Variables	Strongly Disagree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Uncertain N (%)	Agree N (%)	Strongly Agree N (%)
Formation of VCPCs	14 (5.83)	59 (24.58)	40 (16.67)	71 (29.58)	56 (23.33)
Inclusiveness of VCPC Membership	15 (6.25)	30 (12.50)	35 (14.58)	95 (39.58)	65 (27.08)

Activity of VCPCs	21 (8.75)	53 (22.09)	47 (19.58)	71 (29.58)	48 (20.00)
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N: Number; %: Percentage (100%).

Table 2 reveals that respondents' awareness of Mission Vatsalya and community participation in VCPC activities. Less than half of the respondents (45.42%) reported adequate awareness of Mission Vatsalya, while 38.34% lacked sufficient knowledge about the programme, highlighting gaps in information dissemination and 16.25% remained uncertain. Regarding community participation, 44.16% believed that community members actively participated in child protection initiatives, whereas 48.33% perceived community participation as inadequate and 7.50% remained uncertain. These findings indicate that limited public awareness and inconsistent community engagement remain important barriers to effective implementation of child protection interventions.

Table 2. Awareness and Community Participation under Mission Vatsalya (n = 240)

Variables	Strongly Disagree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Uncertain N (%)	Agree N (%)	Strongly Agree N (%)
Awareness of Mission Vatsalya	28 (11.67)	64 (26.67)	39 (16.25)	64 (26.67)	45 (18.75)
Community Participation	8 (3.33)	108 (45.00)	18 (7.50)	23 (9.58)	83 (34.58)

N: Number; %: Percentage (100%).

Table 3 presents respondents' perceptions regarding operational challenges affecting VCPC functioning. A majority (59.58%) agreed that inadequate financial resources limited the effective functioning of Village Child Protection Committees. Financial constraints were reported to affect awareness programmes, committee meetings, monitoring activities, and follow-up services. Regarding social barriers, 42.92% agreed that practices such as child marriage, child labour, gender discrimination, and prevailing social norms hinder child protection efforts, whereas 43.33% disagreed, indicating variation in community perceptions across villages

Table 3. Operational Challenges Affecting Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs) (n = 240)

Variables	Strongly Disagree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Uncertainty N (%)	Agree N (%)	Strongly Agree N (%)
Lack of Financial Resources	21 (8.75)	39 (16.25)	37 (15.42)	81 (33.75)	62 (25.83)
Social Barriers	23 (9.58)	81 (33.75)	33 (13.75)	28 (11.67)	75 (31.25)

N: Number, %: Percentage (100%)

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings obtained through the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) complemented the quantitative results and provided deeper insights into the functioning of Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs) under Mission Vatsalya. Six major themes emerged from the analysis.

Theme 1: Establishment of Village Child Protection Committees: Participants reported that Village Child Protection Committees had been constituted in most Gram Panchayats in accordance with the Mission Vatsalya guidelines. However, several participants indicated that committee formation was often viewed as a procedural requirement rather than a continuously functioning community institution. While committee membership generally represented different stakeholder groups, the level of commitment among members varied considerably.

Theme 2: Limited Functionality and Member Participation: A recurring theme was the irregular functioning of Village Child Protection Committees. Participants highlighted that committee meetings were conducted infrequently, attendance was inconsistent, and several members remained inactive. As a result, many child protection issues were not discussed or addressed promptly, reducing the overall effectiveness of the committees.

Theme 3: Resource and Institutional Constraints: Participants consistently identified inadequate financial resources, limited training opportunities, and weak technical support as major barriers to effective implementation. In addition, poor coordination among the Women and Child Development Department, Education Department, Police, Health Department, and Panchayati Raj Institutions delayed case reporting and service delivery. Participants emphasized that stronger institutional support and regular capacity-building programmes are essential for improving committee performance.

Theme 4: Social and Cultural Barriers to Child Protection: Participants observed that harmful social practices, including child marriage, child labour, gender discrimination, and school dropout, continue to affect child protection efforts in many villages. These practices were often perceived as socially acceptable within communities, making intervention difficult. Participants believed that sustained community awareness and behavioural change programmes are necessary to overcome these barriers.

Theme 5: Positive Outcomes of Active Village Child Protection Committees: Despite operational challenges, participants acknowledged several positive achievements where Village Child Protection Committees functioned actively. Successful interventions included the prevention of child marriages, re-enrolment of school dropouts, identification of vulnerable children, timely referral of child protection cases, and increased awareness regarding child rights. Participants emphasized that active committees generated greater community confidence and improved access to child protection services.

Theme 6: Need for Strengthening Community Participation: Participants unanimously emphasized that child protection cannot be achieved by government agencies alone. They recommended greater involvement of parents, teachers, Panchayati Raj Institutions,

Anganwadi workers, youth groups, and community leaders in Village Child Protection Committee activities. They further suggested regular awareness campaigns, continuous monitoring, digital reporting systems, and adequate financial support to improve the sustainability and effectiveness of Mission Vatsalya.

Discussion

The present study found that 52.91% of the respondents agreed that Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs) had been properly constituted under Mission Vatsalya, indicating that the programme has made considerable progress in establishing institutional mechanisms for child protection at the village level. However, nearly one-third of the respondents perceived that committee formation was inadequate, suggesting inconsistencies in implementation across Gram Panchayats. Similar findings have been reported in studies emphasizing that community-based child protection mechanisms are effective only when they are properly constituted and function in accordance with prescribed guidelines (UNICEF, 2021; Menon, 2024; Verma & Khetrappa, 2025). Research by Wessells (2015) also highlighted that the effectiveness of community child protection committees depends largely on their organizational structure, local ownership, and active participation of community stakeholders.

The present study revealed that 66.66% of the respondents reported that VCPCs included representatives from relevant stakeholder groups, indicating satisfactory adherence to the recommended committee composition. Nevertheless, some respondents perceived inadequate representation of key stakeholders. These findings are consistent with the recommendations of the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) and Mission Vatsalya Operational Guidelines, which emphasize the inclusion of Panchayati Raj Institution members, Anganwadi workers, teachers, health workers, police representatives, and community leaders to ensure coordinated child protection services (Menon, 2024; Keshri, 2023). Similarly, UNICEF (2021) reported that multi-sectoral participation enhances community ownership and improves the identification and referral of children requiring care and protection.

In the present study, 49.58% of the respondents perceived that Village Child Protection Committees actively addressed child protection issues, whereas nearly one-third considered committee activities inadequate. These findings suggest variations in the operational functioning of VCPCs across villages. Similar observations have been reported by Save the Children (2021), which found that although child protection committees exist in many communities, their effectiveness often depends on regular meetings, capacity-building initiatives, and institutional support. Wessells (2015) observed that community-based child protection systems perform better when members receive continuous training, supervision, and technical guidance.

The present study found that 45.42% of the respondents were aware of Mission Vatsalya, while a substantial proportion reported inadequate awareness. Limited programme awareness may reduce community participation and hinder the timely identification and reporting of child protection concerns. Similar findings were reported by UNICEF (2021), which emphasized that community awareness is fundamental for the success of child protection programmes. The

Mission Vatsalya Operational Guidelines also recommend regular information, education, and communication activities to improve public understanding of child rights and available protection services (Menon, 2024).

The present study revealed that 59.58% of the respondents perceived inadequate financial resources as a major challenge affecting the functioning of Village Child Protection Committees. Insufficient financial support may restrict awareness campaigns, committee meetings, monitoring visits, and referral services. Similar findings have been reported by the Bajpai (2018), which identified financial and administrative constraints as major barriers to the effective implementation of child protection programmes. Likewise, UNICEF (2021) reported that sustainable financing is essential for strengthening community-based child protection systems and ensuring continuity of services.

The present study also found that 42.92% of the respondents perceived social barriers, including child marriage, child labour, gender discrimination, and traditional social norms, as significant obstacles to child protection. These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that deeply rooted socio-cultural practices continue to influence children's safety, education, and overall development (UNICEF, 2021; United Nations, 2015). Wessells (2015) similarly argued that community child protection interventions should address harmful social norms through awareness programmes, community mobilization, and behavioural change strategies.

The present study reported that 44.16% of the respondents perceived active community participation in Village Child Protection Committee activities, whereas 48.33% considered community participation inadequate. Effective child protection systems require strong collaboration among families, community organizations, local governance institutions, and service providers. Similar findings have been reported by UNICEF (2026), which demonstrated that higher levels of community engagement improve early identification of vulnerable children and facilitate timely interventions. The Mission Vatsalya framework also recognizes community participation as a fundamental component of decentralized child protection governance (Menon, 2024).

The qualitative findings obtained through Focus Group Discussions supported the quantitative results of the study. Participants reported that although Village Child Protection Committees had been established in most villages, irregular meetings, limited member participation, inadequate training, insufficient financial resources, and poor coordination among departments affected their performance. Participants also highlighted that social acceptance of child marriage, child labour, and school dropout often delayed community intervention. However, where committees functioned actively, respondents reported successful prevention of child marriage, school re-enrolment of children, and increased community awareness regarding child rights. These findings corroborate previous studies emphasizing that effective community participation, interdepartmental convergence, regular capacity-building, and institutional support are essential for strengthening community-based child protection systems (Save the Children, 2009; UNICEF, 2021).

Implications

The findings suggest that although Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs) have strengthened community-based child protection under Mission Vatsalya, their effectiveness is limited by inadequate financial resources, weak coordination, limited awareness, and irregular functioning. Strengthening regular training, ensuring adequate funding, improving interdepartmental coordination, enhancing community awareness through IEC activities, and introducing effective monitoring and digital reporting systems can improve the performance of VCPCs. These measures will contribute to more effective implementation of Mission Vatsalya and strengthen child protection services at the grassroots level.

Limitations

This study was conducted in 30 Gram Panchayats of Raipur district; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other districts or states. The study employed a cross-sectional design and relied on respondents' perceptions, which may be influenced by reporting bias. Future longitudinal and multi-state studies are recommended.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs) play an important role in strengthening community-based child protection under Mission Vatsalya in Raipur district, Chhattisgarh. The findings indicate that although most VCPCs have been constituted with appropriate stakeholder representation, their overall functioning is influenced by limited awareness, irregular committee activities, inadequate financial resources, weak interdepartmental coordination, and persistent social barriers such as child marriage and child labour. The qualitative findings further supported these results by highlighting the need for greater community participation, regular training, and institutional support. Overall, Mission Vatsalya has established a strong foundation for decentralized child protection; however, sustained efforts to strengthen the capacity, resources, monitoring, and community engagement of VCPCs are essential to enhance their effectiveness and ensure the protection, care, and holistic development of vulnerable children at the grassroots level.

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Analytical Study of the Functioning, Implementation, and Challenges of Village Child Protection Committees under Mission Vatsalya in Raipur District, Chhattisgarh

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